

# COLLECTION OVERVIEW

## SOUND RECORDINGS AND RADIO

### I. SCOPE

This collection development overview refers to all manner of sound recordings regardless of content or physical/digital format. The term sound recording is intended to include all carriers of sound which may be reproduced, and includes cylinders, discs, piano rolls and other devices intended to activate mechanical musical instruments, magnetic wire and tape, digital discs, and any other sound carriers which may be devised. It also includes digital audio files of various types, whether stored on physical media or transferred electronically. It covers all music, non-music, spoken word, and radio broadcast recordings in all languages from their earliest historical physical manifestations up to, and including, “born-digital” items. It does not cover unpublished ethnographic sound recordings which are the purview of the American Folklife Center Archive of Folk Culture. This collection overview also pertains to the books, manuscripts, periodicals, computer programs, Web sites, relevant corporate records, etc. whose intellectual content is about sound recording or radio, with the exception of scientific and technical materials on these subjects, which are covered in the Science and Technology collection policy statements.

This collection development overview pertains to sound recordings **as a format**, as well as sound recordings and radio **as subjects**. As such, it is related to acquisitions policies of the Music Division and the American Folklife Center which make reference to sound recordings. The policy also includes guidelines for transfer of sound recordings to the Motion Picture, Broadcasting and Recorded Sound Division from other Library of Congress divisions.

### II. SIZE

The Library of Congress holds the nation's largest public collection of sound recordings (music and spoken word) and radio broadcasts, some 3 million recordings in all. Recordings represent over 110 years of sound recording history in nearly every sound recording format and cover a wide range of subjects and genres in considerable depth and breadth.

The collection includes over 500,000 LPs; 450,000 78-rpm discs; over 500,000 unpublished discs; 200,000 compact discs; 175,000 tape reels; 150,000 45-rpm discs; and 75,000 cassettes. Among the unusual formats in the collection are wires, instantaneous discs, cylinders, music box discs, rolls, bands, dictabelts, and Memovox discs.

The collection includes most musical genres with particular strength in opera, chamber music, folk, jazz, musical theater, popular, and classical.

LC's collection contains more radio broadcasts (over .5 million) than any other library or archive in the United States. A sampling of prominent collections follows:

- **NBC Collection** 150,000 sixteen-inch lacquer discs from the 1930s-1980s, including tens of thousands of World War II-related broadcasts
- **Armed Forces Radio and Television Service (AFRTS)** 300,000 twelve- and sixteen-inch discs from 1942-1998
- **Office of War Information (OWI)** over 50,000 instantaneous lacquer discs from 1942-1945
- **National Public Radio (NPR)** The cultural programming portions of NPR broadcasts, 27,000 tapes from 1971-1992
- **Voice of America (VOA)** Over 50,000 discs and tapes of musical event broadcasts dating from 1946-1988
- **WOR-AM Collection** Flagship station of the Mutual Broadcasting Network located in New York City. Collection includes several thousand 16-inch instantaneous transcription discs, the paper archives of WOR, as well as an outstanding group of materials relating to the radio career of Phillips H. Lord.

### **III. GENERAL RESEARCH STRENGTHS**

The sound recordings collections of the Library of Congress offer great depth in a number of fields as well as general breadth of subjects and fields of music represented. Particular strengths include:

- Unique jazz and classical music 'live' performance recordings
- Authors reading their works
- Recordings of historic speeches, public remarks by notable individuals, and news broadcast recordings
- Early (pre-1915) sound recordings
- Network radio broadcasts 1935-1950
- Jazz and American popular music
- Published recordings of classical music including obscure 20<sup>th</sup> century works
- Topical songs copyrighted as cassette and CD-R sound recordings
- Opera recordings, published and unpublished
- Aural documentation of World War II
- Documentation of American broadcasting

### **IV. AREAS OF DISTINCTION**

The Library of Congress places primary emphasis on acquiring sound recordings produced in the United States, including recordings of music, the spoken word, sounds, naturally occurring phenomena and historical occurrences. The Library acquires

recordings that document American culture regardless of contemporary views of their aesthetic value, yet special efforts are made to acquire recordings of recognized cultural or historical significance. Significant recordings released outside of the United States are also acquired. Except in rare instances, the Library does not collect recordings about medicine and agriculture, or material used for training or instructional purposes.

To this end, the holdings for recorded sound and radio reflect the following:

1. **Edition of sound recording.** The Library seeks to acquire the most complete, uncut, and authentic edition available.
2. **Artifactual value of sound recordings.** The collection of monographs and serials accompanied by sound recordings, previously called the “Phonocase” collection, is now divided by format, with the general collections receiving the print materials and the Motion Picture, Broadcasting and Recorded Sound Division maintaining the sound recordings. However, M/B/RS retains the complete item when the packaging has significant artifactual value.
3. **Physical Form of Recording.** The current preservation standard at the Library is 96khz / 24 bit broadcast wave file, so that is the preferred format. If this quality is not always available, so the Library seeks to acquire the product with the highest bit rate and word length. The Library also collections the following media in descending order of preference: DVD audio formats, compact discs, vinyl discs, reel-to-reel tape, and cassette.
4. **Hardware.** The Library does not actively collect audio "hardware," that is, phonographs and other playback devices. However, antique and obsolete playback machines are selectively acquired for two purposes. A representative sampling of restored antique playback devices is acquired and maintained for demonstration and educational programs and to recreate the listening experience contemporary with older recordings. Machines are also acquired for use by the Library's preservation program, to ensure that the Library can playback obsolete media, such as cylinders and wire recordings.
5. **Published musical sound recordings.** The Library holds a comprehensive collection of most forms of musical sound recordings published in the United States, excepting educational children’s recordings and pedagogical recordings. For music published outside of the United States the Library samples popular music and comprehensively acquires scholarly editions of recordings (i.e., those with analytical or contextual program notes) and those containing authentic performances of vernacular music.
6. **Radio broadcast recordings.** In the 1976 U.S. Copyright Act Congress specifically empowers the Library of Congress to save copies of radio programs that are “of present or potential public or cultural interest, historical significance, cognitive value, or otherwise worthy of preservation, including copies and

phonorecords of published and unpublished transmission programs.” Within this broad mandate, the Library concentrates on maintaining a comprehensive collection of original and access recordings of network radio broadcasts from the 1920s on.

7. **Archival materials and personal papers.** Motion Picture, Broadcasting and Recorded Sound acquires and maintains strong collections of the papers of individuals, and the records of organizations, whose work is primarily in the fields for which the Motion Picture, Broadcasting and Recorded Sound Division are responsible. Of particular interest are radio scripts and other production materials, photographs, and correspondence. The division holds the personal papers of H. Vose Greenough Jr, Isabelle Sayers, John Secrist Jr, Jim Walsh, as well as others

**8. Recordings significant to the history of sound recording**

The Library acquires examples of experimental recordings and foil recordings, pre-1950s stereo recordings, and other items that exhibit significant developments in recording technology.

9. **Books, periodicals, and other materials that relate to sound recordings.** In addition to the large collection of record manufacturers' catalogs maintained by the Library's Music Division, the Library collects the following classes of print material relating to broadcasting and sound recording at the comprehensive level:

HE 8660-8688	Radio. Wireless telegraph
HE 8689-8700.9	Radio and television broadcasting
ML156-ML158	Discographies
ML100-ML109	Dictionaries, encyclopedias
PN 1991	Radio broadcasts
TK5101-6702	

## **V. ELECTRONIC RESOURCES**

Via SONIC, the Sound Online Inventory and Catalog site, the Library of Congress Recorded Sound Collection makes available the bibliographic records for some 2.5 million audio recordings including multiple copies. Published and unpublished recordings, contained on a variety of physical formats representing the history of sound recording from late nineteenth century cylinders and discs to the latest digital files, include radio broadcasts and spoken word, as well as vocal and instrumental music.

## **VI. WEAKNESSES/EXCLUSIONS**

Although the Library collections comprehensively in this subject, with rare instances, the Library does not collect recordings about medicine and agriculture, or material used for training or instructional purposes. Also the Library will not necessarily retain the original packaging or recording for consumer magnetic media (e.g., cassettes) and that have been reformatted for preservation. In these instances, too, the artistry or importance of the original packaging will guide the Library's decision of what to retain.